

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 20, 1869..

Subject : The Comforting God.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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THE COMFORTING GOD.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—2. THESS. II, 16, 17.

There are happy and easy souls that are buoyed up by inward hopefulness and outward prosperities, who can hardly understand the need of so much being said about God's consolations, and who scarcely derive any light or comfort from those numerous passages in the word of God that to others are like water in the wilderness.

There are some, less happy, who, in themselves, in their friends, in the church, in the world, see full enough for anxiety, often for discouragement, and sometimes even for despondency.

There are many who to themselves seem to have a hard time in life; and to all such, whether this feeling be founded on reality, or upon an exaggerated sense of the troubles that they bear, the words that I have read, and such like words, must come with peculiar cheer.

There is a singular sweetness in this and similar passages, when they are regarded as voices sent down to men in their struggles through life. They are like open glades in a dark forest, where the sun lies on warm banks, the father of many flowers. And so these openings with summer in them have peculiar relish and charm to many.

There is a recognition in the word of God, of human need. There is a condescending element in truth, as in the Master. There is in it a sympathy with men that is utterly unlike nature, which has no voice of sympathy, if you interpret it from the material side, but only inflexible, immutable law, saying, "The soul that obeys shall live, and that is its own look-out; and the soul that disobeys shall die, and I do not care." Nature, as interpreted by material law, gives birth to men, throws them out, as it were, into this wilderness, and says to everyone, "Let strength prevail." Life is called a "battle of existence." Men suffer. They are told, coolly, that they have broken the law,

and that they must expect to suffer. Are they that enjoy always keepers of the law? That question is not often mooted. But there is with many, looking into the course of nature, a sense of its hardness and coldness—especially to all such as are on the shadowy side of its favors. And when they open the word of God, and find that God is not a governing force alone, but a tender Father, who thinks of men, and cares for their infirmities, just as a father in the household thinks of his children, and cares for their infirmities, not taking delight in those that are grown up half so much as in those that are not grown, whose very mistakes are in some sense dear to him—when they find in the revelation of God such a Being as this, it is a source of great cheer and comfort to them.

Consider this passage, then, as a revelation of God's disposition. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself." That is much, but there is more—"and God." And then, as if that word *God* would not be fruitful in their imagination—"even our Father." That brings him down and draws him very near. And as if the word *Father*, as applied to a Being who has such an immense family—the universe—were not enough, the apostle still qualifies it—"which hath loved us." And as if that declaration would require still further opening, he adds, "and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace"—breaking away the misty horizon, and giving us to see the whole sweep and strength of the coming life. But as that is something afar off, the apostle seems to go back again and show that not alone this future glory, but something nearer and more personal, is given. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

Now, if a man is comforted in his very heart, and if he is established in every "word" (in all his sayings), and in every "work" (in all his doings), what more can he have? What more can a man ask than a revelation which brings the Lord Jesus Christ near to him as his personal Friend, and God as his Father, with the promise in his hand of immortality and glory; hope through grace being brought in to comfort him, and to comfort him in the very source of his feelings, his heart—and to give him that comfort not as a mere luxury, but in such a way that it shall work out in practical forms, and establish him in the whole of his life—in all that he speaks, all that he purposes, and all that he does?

I cannot read such a passage as this without feeling that it is like a mother's putting her hand on her child's head and soothing it, and stroking down its curls, and fondling it, or putting her arms about it, and caressing it. As a mother not simply speaks, but in a thousand

winning ways carries out the words in practice, so when I read this passage, it is as though God's Spirit caressed me, and was bringing me comfort. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." It is music to me, it has been music to many, and I trust that it is music to many here.

Consider, also, the sympathy and the fatherly aspect in which God is here represented, as contrasted with the sternness and rigor of that holy God that is taught and conceived of too often. It is, to be sure, true that God is the Vindicator of truth, and that he will not spare, finally, the guilty. It is true that our God is a "consuming fire." It is true on the one hand that there is an element and that there are attributes of God which are fitted to deal with matter, with pure force, with resisting dispositions that live in groveling appetites and passions, and are unsusceptible to any higher motives, and must be roused up and stimulated by the vigor of these lower, and, I might say, physical motives. And yet, on the other hand, it is true that there is a side of God which is fitted to be preached to men in their lowest savagism, and which has a certain stimulating, rousing power. It is that view of God which is to be preached when nothing else will reach men.

How is it with a father who chides his son? First he says, "Stop, my son, and think." If that does not do, he says, "Remember that my feelings are bound up in you. I beseech of you, consider this. Take it to heart." If the boy will neither take it to head nor to heart, then the father interposes, and says, "My son, it *must* not be." And if that is not sufficient, he says, "It *shall* not be. I stand here not only to make you happy, but to make your brothers and sisters happy; and I shall not allow you to stand in the way of their happiness." He tries the child with reason, and affection, and authority; and if the child is insensible to all of these, he tries a little *physical persuasion*; and that brings the child to.

How was it? The child was living, as it were, down so low in his nature that he was susceptible to no other than a physical motive; and this alternative motive was ready when nothing else would do. It was the most desperate remedy.

It is so with God. The fullness, the blossom of his nature resides up in the realm of intelligence and moral excellence and affection; and if men only know how to pluck the fruit of the higher life, they shall always be dealt with by gentleness, and sweetness, and caressing tenderness: but, rather than that they should perish, God interposes his authority, and says, "I will by no means clear the guilty. He that sins, let him do it at his peril." And if this does not turn the man, then God

is a "consuming fire" to him. God meets him at every step and stage of the way down, and at every point in his organization, with the appropriate stimulus which belongs to the condition that he may happen to be in.

That which is the best adapted to the human condition is God's favor. When Moses said, "God, show me thy glory," God refused to show him his glory in the sense in which he thought of it—that is, with the scenic outflash of all creation, revealing angels trooping about the throne, and exhibiting all the manifestations of divine power. Moses thought to see wonderful visions; but God said, "I will show you my *goodness*." It is as if God rebuked the false notion which Moses had, and, pointing to his goodness, said, "This is my glory."

What is God's goodness? "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin." Although he brought up the end, by saying, "and that will by no means clear the guilty," you see there was but one clause of that, while all the other branches and twigs of the the sentence were of mercy and goodness.

If God were permitted to be good to you all the time, he never would be anything else. He is severe only when you need severity. It is not for the sake of gratifying any desire to inflict pain that he administers chastisement, but to fulfill the declaration, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

It is this view of God that men need—especially in communities like ours, where they have been trained to conceive of God as the Guardian of the law, which he is; as perfectly holy, which he is; as lifted infinitely above human weakness and imperfection, which he is; as an ideal and abstraction of everything that is sublime and noble, which he is. When you come to make use of your God, and you only have a God that is an abstraction, how cold, how vapory, how remote he seems! The vaster he is, the less tangible and the less useful he becomes. When you conceive of God simply as a being that is holy, and that looks upon sin with abhorrence, you cannot draw near to him. Fear stands between you and him. What men need in their discouraged state, is the view of a God who, though holy, though ideally perfect, and though infinitely lifted up above all imperfections of every kind, is nevertheless a Father in tenderness, in gentleness, in sweetness, and in persevering and patient industry of recovery. What men need is the view of a God who, though he never experienced sin, knows every inflection of it, every approach of it, every proportion of it, every complication of it, and every excuse for it: and knows it, not to hate, but as a

benevolent physician knows the disease of his patient, to cure it; or as a kind teacher knows the fault of his pupil, to eradicate it; or as a parent knows the ugly temper of his child, to overcome it, and loves the child, sometimes, almost in proportion to that ugliness. This view of God which presents him as the all-helpful One, not separating himself from sinners, but giving them power to come back to him, is the view that gives cheer and comfort, and is the one given in our text.

Consider the hopeful, genial spirit which one acquires by familiarity with such a view of his Father as this. If we were left in this life to fight our own battle alone; if we were placed in the midst of natural laws only, and left to obey them as best we could, I do not understand how we could have much moral buoyancy.

Ancient literature is divided into two parts. There is on one side the jeering, scoffing literature of men that had no moral feeling; but on the other hand, almost universally we find that literature has a strain of sadness running through it. The problem of human life, of development in society—the kingdom of God on earth, in other words—appeared to them so mysterious, and so obscure, that there is an undertone to the highest literature of the unenlightened world; and it is a tone that has found a response, I suppose, in almost every reflective man's bosom.

If you look into this world, and see that men were born almost as animals; that there is no revelation of what nature is; that the race has been obliged to grope for knowledge as to the very first laws of existence; that they did not even know the composition of the air which they breathed, and which was indispensable to them; that they were under the necessity of carrying a multiplex machine whose health and condition depended on a thousand circumstances which were not made known to them; that they have been stumbling upon diseases which no knowledge was given them to foresee or avoid; that through ages they have sought, groaning and suffering, to find out facts essential to their safety and comfort; that their life has been spent in studying to ascertain what the heavens mean, and what the earth means, having been obliged to find out these things for themselves, while, if there was a God, he sat in grim silence behind the cloud, and looked on with unconcern—if you behold human life from this side, it is dismal beyond conception. Under such circumstances, the world seems like a dungeon, men seem like prisoners, and God seems like a jailor, who watches the bolt and key, and puts bread and water through the grates for them, and lets them alone. Wherefore we find in Jesus Christ a revelation of the paternity of God, coming in to relieve this agonizing suspense, this terrific strife, which disturbs men's thoughts in respect to the economies of nature. And when God is

represented in our text as Father, how full of cheer and consolation is the view which is presented!

This view of comfort which is contained in our text, may be carried out in many particulars. Christian life is ordained to comfort us in our struggles, for instance, with fear. "Fear hath torment." It is a tormentor. It haunts men, night and day. Great fears may come seldom; but the poison emery, the dust of fear, comes in, as it were, at every crevice, and settles down upon every fair thing in life. There are innumerable petty fears. There are ten thousand little hauntings. How full is life of fear which takes away from men the enjoyment of their prosperity! Fear stands by the cradle, and threatens the mother; and all her love and thankfulness cannot make her happy while fear scowls and threatens. The spectre of fear hovers between lovers, and they dread and suffer. It shoots like a meteor along the twilight meditations of evening. It hides the sun at noonday with clouds. It threatens health with sickness, and sickness with death, and death with numberless terrors. Cares are the offspring of fear. They sting like noxious insects in tropical nights. Fear discourages poverty. It takes ease away from riches. It is the persecutor of ambition. It is the parasite of conscience. It plants upon conscience its own evil growth, until sometimes conscience is but an inquisitor, with a whip of scorpions. Fear perpetually exaggerates. It is always changing, and coming up in new forms, and always dread forms. It is full of illusions. All the way through it is undermining, undermining, undermining, the joys and hopes of life. And all this too, in the realm where Christ has been revealed. Go from house to house and mark down how large a play there is of fear; how much of motive is fear; how largely men work for fear of more suffering than they choose to have. And see how men are restrained by fear, standing in the place of conscience. See how fear is like broken glass, every particle of which cuts the foot that treads on it. How is fear the destroyer of men's peace, perpetually rasping them, and beating them with small whips, or large ones; as the case may be. One would think that the name of the God who governs this world was Fear.

Right over against the gloomy face of fear stands the Lord Jesus Christ, and these words of ineffable cheer: "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts!" That is just what hearts that are sick want—*comfort*; and they have it in Christ Jesus, and in the fatherhood of God, and nowhere else, in such measure, or with such pertinency of application.

Consider, too, the discouragements which men endure from an exacting conscience. How numberless they are! Conscience gives to

life a certain rigor which makes it almost fruitless of joy. Men wrestle with their conscience, and throw it off entirely, and then it acts only as a remorse. If conscience is active, and men are looking out beforehand for the path of duty, what infinite anxieties does it excite! And when, from day to day, men measure their real life by their ideal of life, what numberless sorrows does it bring! What discouragements do men feel who are living by conscience! One's ideal is forever rising, and conduct never keeps pace with duty. There is, therefore, always this fatal discord between the ideal and the real. And if a man is attempting to live by conscience, he is going through that struggle which is described in the 7th of Romans. He would fain do good. The law, the rule of goodness, is holy and just. He loves it "after the inward man." His reason approves it, and his moral sentiments approve it, and he strives after it. But, when he would do good, *evil is present with him*. And this is the experience of every man who is attempting to live by his conscience.

Then comes the declaration, "God, your Father, who has loved you, and given you hope of immortality, will also comfort you in this very strife and struggle of your conscience."

Contrast this summery cheerfulness, this happiness of the apostle's exhortation, with that desolateness which springs up in men who look out upon spiritual life at large, as a part of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this world. How disconsolate the cause of God has often seemed among men! The force of society is so strong, the force of custom is so strong, the strifes of life are so strong, and the lower animal passions are so immeasurably stronger than the moral sentiments and the reason, that, when men think that it is a part of the divine economy, and that the duty is incumbent upon each one to bring up that kingdom in "which dwelleth righteousness," and that right over against this kingdom is a gulf stream of corruption, they are disconsolate at the work. They say, "There is no use. The little that a man can do bears no proportion to the vast wilderness that grows with rampant luxuriance in iniquity."

What if a man should attempt to reclaim all the land on the globe, the earth being his farm? What if he should undertake to drain all the marshes, enrich all the deserts, subdue all low and untractable ground, and put in the plow, and bring to harvest the toll of every acre of ground? What a discouraging business that would be! When a man had worked, and put other men to work, as much as he could, he would not have clipped the fringes of the forests, even. His work would be contemptible, in comparison with the task he had set out to perform. If a man has five hundred acres; if he has half of that; yes, if he has a hundred acres, or even half of that, he has all that he can

properly cultivate. If he is a good farmer, ten acres are enough. But if a man should attempt to take in the whole globe, and eradicate the rocks, and subdue the wildernesses, and cleanse the soil of all noxious things, and plant good seed, and give them the sun and air which they need, and to do it in his life-time, or any considerable part of it, would it not damp his enterprise and discourage his industry?

Yet that is easy compared with bringing up the race on the globe to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the sweetness of that love which is breathed by Christ on the human soul. When you look upon the work of God in regenerating a single human soul, it is multitudinous; it is infinite. And when men go from the individual to the household, and from the household to the neighborhood, and from the neighborhood to the village, and from the village to the city, and from the city to the state, and from the state to the nation, and from the nation to all nations, and look upon the cause of God everywhere, and think, "This is the work which is purposed of God in the truth, and by his providence, and his grace, and every one of us is enlisted in it, as soldiers, teachers, husbandmen, laborers in God's vineyard," they are discouraged. They say, "The declaration of Christ that *the field is the world*, must be a figure of speech." And how few people there are who hang over the globe, and take in the ages, as Christ did, feeling for men, and bearing them in the bosom of his care and thought! How many there are that look out upon the great work of God in this world,—the work that is dear to him, and the work that must come to pass,—as a child, in a stormy evening, from the fisher's cottage door, looks upon the thundering sea, and the scowling heavens, and dares not go out, but shudders, and shuts the door, and sets himself down in his own little quiet nook! And when men attempt this work, how discouraged they become! How they need, above all other things, a strengthening faith, a cheerful hope, and a sense of God present, and omnipotent in goodness, to bring confidence to their discouragement!

But more familiar, perhaps, and universal, are the sadnesses which spring up in our domestic, our economic, our secular life. The whole economy of labor, of weariness, of ill-health, of straitened circumstances, of poverty, of strifes, of misunderstandings, of apprehensions, of anxiety as to what we shall eat and drink and wear; the conflict of friends; the annoyances which are occasioned by the falling out of others around about us; the ten thousand misadventures, no one of which is much in itself, but which in the mass are, like a cloud of dust, annoying—these come in to destroy our peace. And how many there are who, week by week, think of the Sabbath day as a vacation from care!

There are many that walk well-clad, and in velvet, whose way is easy, and who have no anxieties as to their life; and yet, within the sound of their voice are scores and hundreds who awake from uneasy dreams, saying, "Give me this day my daily bread." You do not know what scope there is in that petition of the Lord's Prayer. You do not know how many there are who look upon their children and put a mother's heart into that prayer, and send it throbbing before God—"Give us this day our daily bread." You do not know how many there are to whom fear comes as a barbed arrow from the bow of poverty. You do not know how many are goaded by duty. You do not know how many there are in this congregation who thank God that he has given them a dress sufficient to enable them to sit in the midst of his people unwatched and unrebuked. You do not know what a fight is going on in the lives of many. There are lions and bears and tigers in the wilderness and in the desert; but I tell you there are no such wild beasts as those which are in men's houses and spheres of life. There are ten thousand misunderstandings, and quarrels, and misapprehensions, which, mingled in life's cup, make it bitter; and men drink it to the very dregs.

All is not as fair as it seems. And when our streets are swept and garnished, I sometimes walk in them as in a vain show, and say to myself, "Why need men go to theatres? What dramas there are here!" Every house is a stage where plays are enacted. The old saying is that *there is a skeleton in every house*. A skeleton? There are a hundred of them in some houses, that stalk all night and walk all day, in the form of miseries and troubles and trials—and that among persons who call themselves Christians. How few there are that are sweet-tempered! How few there are that are serene! How few there are that know what *peace* means, even for one hour! How few there are that have the mark of God on their brow, and in their eye! How few there are who carry with them the summer of faith and the serenity of victory! How few there are that carry the presence of God with them! How few there are that are really happy!

Now, in the midst of this vast and ever-unwearied breaking of the surge on the shore of experience, how cheerful, how joyous are the words of God! There is one reason why the Bible will never be upset just as long as the world lasts. You may prove to me that there is no such thing as inspiration; you may prove that this Book was dug out of a rock; you may destroy the prophets' authority; you may take from the apostles their authority; you may take away the theory that the Bible came in any sense from God. Yet there is that in this Book which will keep it intact and make it potential as long as there is a heart to feel sorrow or to beat with hope. It is its humanity.

It is its courage. It is the might and power of its love. It is the vast sympathy which wraps mankind as the atmosphere wraps the globe. It is its thought and care for men in all their wants. For the poor, the needy, the weak, the helpless, the crying, the sighing, the discouraged, the down-trodden, the unvictorious, the captives, little children, mighty monarchs, peasants, nobles—for all men—there is here a throb and a yearning. There are thousands of blessings held out to them—strength, bread, fruit, water, wine, swords, spears—everything for humanity—whatever they need in their masterly struggles in this world. This Book is an ark into which men will run, as long as the world stands, for succor and consolation. And who should have made such a Book as this, as a way cast up on which “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads,” if it be not God?

Let me read you some of these very points of encouragement from this Book. Listen to a few words from the 49th chapter of Isaiah:

Zion said, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”

Oh! how many have felt that God had forsaken them! How many have mourned and felt that the heavens over them were brass, and that the earth was as the ashes of the burnt wilderness!

Now hear the answer:

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”

What is it in the journey, what is it in the *bivouac*, what is it on the field where the wounded are weltering in their blood, that one last looks upon? There in the hand is the little daguerreotype of the wife and children. The last gaze is on that. And the Lord says, “Your portrait is graven on my hands. I carry it on my palms, ever before me. I never lift up my hands to the stars that I do not see it. I never stretch out my hands to fulfill the decrees of omnipotence, that that picture does not fall upon my eyes.”

Think what language this is to come from the lips of the Crowned Head of the universe. Think what comfort and cheer there is in it.

Look at these other words in the 40th chapter of Isaiah. You do not read Isaiah half enough. There are great things in that book.

“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?”

How many of you that have come down to the great city, and wandered lonesome along the streets, have said, “There is no person living, that I know of, who cares for me. If I were to die to-morrow, nobody would shed a tear over me. I am alone in the world, and there is nobody to think of me!” But hear the word of the Lord:

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no search-

ing of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

These are but single blossoms plucked out from whole trees full that abound in this garden of the Lord.

Consider, next, some of the methods of comfort which experience has revealed to us. When, in our struggle of Christian life, we are discouraged at our own pride and selfishness; when we are discouraged because we make so little head against our temper, because our passions seem not to be overcome, or weakened only by the changes of life and the progress of old age; when we look at ourselves, and our whole way of life, and are discouraged thereby, how much sweetness and beauty and comfort and encouragement there frequently is in the beautiful lives of others! We look upon one and another, and feel that to look upon them is a renewal of our faith—the embodiment of Christian peace and serenity. One single Christian in a neighborhood, I had almost said, is enough. You do not want a light-house at every point on the shore. One every few leagues is sufficient to point out the way. It would be better, of course, if light-houses were multiplied so as to cast daylight over all the night scene; but one here and there on prominent points saves men. It would be better if whole households lived in a serene and beautiful Christian faith; but one faithful servant in a household may save it. I have seen the slave-woman whose fidelity was the means of the conversion of William Wirt—that eminent Richmond lawyer. I have known of cases in which slaves carried salvation to whole plantations. I have known domestic servants that lived such disinterested and beautiful lives, that members of the household were converted through the influence of their example. The blossoms are not always on the tops of the trees. They are sometimes on the branches that are down near the ground. I have seen aunts, I have seen maiden sisters, I have seen plain sewing women, I have seen the lowest in poverty, who stood with such erect, sweet, pure, heavenly-mindedness, that it was worth a man's while to go and look at them, to renew his own faith in himself. Men are frequently comforted and cheered by the exemplary lives of those who are living in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes I have heard these same people say that it was a mystery to them that God should have debarred them from the usefulness that they longed for; that they should have been made obscure; that they should have no tongue for speaking. I laugh at them! Do you suppose that when a honeysuckle blossoms, and its fragrance goes abroad, it has any idea how far it goes? It leaves the blossom, and the

stem and vine know no more about it. It is wafted by the wind. It is sent through all the neighborhood. And the blossom does not know how it sheds its sweetness everywhere. It is unconscious. Do you suppose a candle in an eminent place knows how much light it sends out, or how many see it? Do you suppose a star knows what is said about it? It, too, is unconscious. And it is the unconscious power of a symmetrical Christian life and character, that is the very richness and power of it, frequently.

So, too, the victorious issue of tried souls is a comfort to those who are in the trial. When, on a hard fought field, the shout goes up on either wing, those that are in the centre, and are well nigh overcome, hearing it, know that there is victory on some part of the field, and take courage, and redouble their blows, and press forward. Oftentimes the comfort that comes from seeing others victorious, brings victory to us.

Oh! to see men that have been much tried get through safely; to stand by men who feared death, and see them go into the river to find that all fear is taken away from them; to question them as they go deeper and deeper, and hear them say, "I fear no evil;" to hear their voices after we lose them from sight; to hear the rustle of vague sounds, as of heavenly music from that exceeding throng on the other side, that bear them victoriously home—this gives comfort. Can any man stand and witness the departure of a man from this life, and his victory over death, without feeling more fortitude, more faith and more courage for his own battle? No man ever went through where there was tremendous odds against him, and gained a victory for himself, that he did not gain a victory for multitudes besides. We do not know when we are fighting for ourselves, how many battles we are fighting for others, too. A man who has overcome temper, or passion, or avarice; a man who has brought his whole life out on a Christian plane, and has been a captain and not a private, is made a leader of multitudes beside; and all that look upon him feel that God is establishing their hearts in the way of virtue.

In this way it is that we derive great consolation from looking back through the lives of holy men. There is a picture gallery opened in the 11th of Hebrews. Paul's picture gallery it is. In England, a great while ago, a national gallery was gotten up; and all the kings (the poorest they had), and nobles, and literary characters, and scientists, and what not, had a place in it. It was a very good and noble thing. If we were to begin now it would not cost us much, because there are not many that we would need to collect in our day; but this establishing a gallery which presents to the eye pictures of men who have achieved and done worthily is a glorious conception. Paul set up one,

and gathered all the poor and needy, and those that were counted unworthy of honor, and set them around about this magnificent chapter—more magnificent than any other, except the next one to it. I like to go round, as Paul did, and look upon them, and think how they suffered, and what they achieved, and how long their power has lasted. There too are the singers, and they are singing still. David was never so musical as to-day. There are the wise and the philosophic. The Proverbs of Solomon were never so fitting as to-day. There are the sublime old teachers and statesmen indeed—the prophets that attempted to found commonwealths on moral ideas. They were never so wise, and their wisdom was never so much in place, as to-day. There are all those men that were hewn, and exiled, and driven out in the olden time.

Now, let us open a Christian gallery, and take all men that have been martyrs; all men that, for the sake of maintaining truth, have left home and country, and lived in mountains and caves; all men that have exiled themselves, and wasted their lives in dungeons and hospitals; all men that have stood patiently in their lot, and suffered, and died, and gained their victory, and gone to glory. I look upon the portraits of these men, and say, "That grace which has carried every one of them through, can carry me through." That grace which made a saint out of so tumultuous a nature as Peter; that grace which could take such a nature as John's, who invoked fire on the heads of the villagers because they would not receive Christ, and make it so sweet that it was saccharine; that grace which transformed the most fiery temper, and took away the desire for vengeance from men, can subdue the hardness and obduracy of our hearts.

We are not the first men who have been on God's forge. He has had thousands on his anvil before. He knows the infliction of every instrument, and how to temper every blow. It is the same blessed God that is workman still. And when I look upon the virtues of those old saints, and the victories that are occurring now, from day to day, I am comforted and cheered.

Once more, God comforts by the peculiar comforting effect which there is in his soul resting on ours. Christian brethren, do you believe in the Holy Ghost? Do you believe that God's sun actually comes into contact with the lily, and pours it full, warms it, and changes it? Do you believe that the Holy Ghost shines down into the souls of men that open themselves to its influence? I do. I believe it is the intrinsic nature of God, shining into the soul that receives it, to bring to it light, and warmth, and hope, and cheer, and comfort unspeakable.

And that is not the whole of it. As it is the nature of some things to be bitter and the nature of other things to be sweet, so it is the na-

ture of God's spirit to bring to souls that peace which is called one of the "fruits of the Spirit." Do not you know how diversely different people affect you—even good people? Some persons are so sad that when you go into their presence they draw you down; and when you leave them you feel that you have wasted sympathy. Others are so rigidly conscientious that when you go into their presence you feel overstrained and keyed up in that direction. Some people seem to suck sympathy out of you, when you are with them, so that when you leave them you are as a sponge that has been squeezed in the hand till there is no water in it. But now and then you find a person who, instead of affecting you in any of these ways, soothes, sweetens and cheers you, and makes you feel better, and more hopeful. Blessed are those persons into whose presence we go rejoicing, and out of whose presence you come still more joyful. And, as I have said, it is the quality of God's soul, when it comes down into ours, to fill it with peace—that peace "which passeth all understanding:" not the peace of indolence; not a supine peace, but that peace which means the harmony of every faculty raised to the highest point of normal excitement. Perfect harmony—that is the peace which God brings to us when he comes into our souls. And oh, how full of hope and comfort is this view!

Let me not close in my own words, but in the language of sacred writ.

"Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now, the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

Ye that have to-day come into the church of Christ, and entered upon the Christian life, do not look upon it as a life of storms. It has its struggles; but it has its Christ, that walks on the waves, and rebukes the storm. Do not suppose that it is a life of mere luxury, according to the secular idea. It is a life of duty. It is a life of labor in the cause of Him who makes labor sweet, and says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

May God cheer you. May God comfort you. May God bear you through life with such cheer and comfort that, by-and-by, you, in turn, may console others with the consolation wherewith you are comforted.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

O Lord our God, we thank thee that thou hast gathered, in every age, seed to serve thee. Although but a handful, at times, have been faithful to thy name and cause, thou hast been a defence to them. Thou hast enlarged their numbers. Thou hast through them spread abroad a knowledge of the truth. Through them thou hast made known thy power among the nations of the earth. We rejoice that still there are so many tokens of thy presence among men. We rejoice that thou art gathering these brotherhoods—these churches—of thine own children; and that thou art manifesting thyself among them, comforting them, strengthening them, purifying them, and making their life to be a guiding light to many wandering souls. We thank thee that from time to time so many are brought in, housed from the storm, and succored in their extreme peril and distress; and that they take upon them the name of Christ, and become obedient children to him. We thank thee that so many are walking comfortably in our midst, with so many, and such strong hopes, founded upon the faithfulness of thy promises. We thank thee that thou hast ministered to them such consolations and such victories in times of conflict. We thank thee that there are so many witnesses in our midst, that thy word is yet powerful, that thou art gracious, and that thou dost forgive sins, and renew the heart, and translate those that were thine enemies into the kingdom of thy dear son, and make them heirs and children.

And now we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon those who are gathered into our number to-day. We pray that if they have come from sister churches, they may take this occasion to renew their consecration of themselves; to review all the way in which thou hast led them; to make mention of thy mercies in times past, and to take courage for the time to come. May they not abide among us fruitless, but may they bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. And we pray that thou wilt take into thy fatherly care and keeping those dear ones who are now gathered in from the world, and upon whom now rests the sacred name of Jesus for the first time. The prayers of beloved parents are answered in them. Thou hast shown mercy; and we pray that now they may be encircled by the arms of thy mercy, that they may neither stumble nor fall. And wilt thou multiply to them far above their expectation the joy and the peace which there is in believing. We beseech of thee that they may walk worthy of that high vocation by which they are called. We pray that others may be brought in by them. May there be many that shall like thyself go out to seek and to save men.

We pray that thou wilt revive thy work upon every hand. In our families, in all the relations which we sustain, may we be preachers of the Gospel to every one around about us. silently, by our example, and, at fit times and opportunities, by word of mouth. May the name of Jesus Christ be heard in our midst.

Comfort, O Lord Jesus! those that are in the shadow. To those that sit in the region and shadow of death, be thou very gracious and very near. Be with all that wrestle with hardness and poverty. Be with those that are sodden with care. Draw near to those who are discouraged by any event and circumstance in their lives. Breathe thy peace upon all that are troubled.

Grant, we pray thee, that there may be a fresh and joyful recognition in multitudes of hearts, to-day, of thy power to save not only in death, but in life. We pray that thou wilt draw thy people so near to thee that they shall not seem as beggars' children, but as, what they are, sons of God. And though their raiment is vile, may they clothe themselves in thy righteousness. Though they have no bread but that which perisheth, may they reach up and take that bread which thou dost give, even thine own self. And we pray that thou wilt grant that in Christian living there may be more and more joy; more and more strength; more and more victory; more and more beauty in the eyes of the world.

We pray, O Lord! that thou wilt succor those that are wandering. Bring back those

* Immediately following the reception of members into the Church.

that are backsliding. Rescue any that are in danger of apostacy. Return them to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. And may the way of holiness seem more and more to men the way of honor and of peace. And grant that there may be multitudes who shall throng it.

Oh! bring in the latter day glory which thou hast promised. Hasten the time when all nations shall know thee. May wars cease, and confusions and turmoils and revolutions pass away. May that sun rise which shall have no setting, and all the earth see thy salvation.

We ask it for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

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